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Review of Aphrodite's Tortoise: The Veiled Woman of Ancient Greece

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Corinne Crawford 1980-2007

Women's Classical Caucus:
35 years of bringing women to Classics

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Preferred means of submission is by email, as either an attachment readable by Word or an embedded email message.

Thanks to our wonderful Webmistress, Chris Ann Matteo, our website is now an excellent place to find additional information about the Caucus: <http://www.wcclassics.org>

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BOOK REVIEWS

Ann Michelini, Editor

Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones, *Aphrodite's Tortoise: The Veiled Woman of Ancient Greece*. Classical Press of Wales, 2003. ISBN: 0-9543845-3-9. Pp. x + 358. 173 black-and-white figures. Cloth. \$69.50.

Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones has written a fascinating and essential book on the subject of women's habitual veiling in ancient Greece. By analyzing veiling as a manifestation of a male ideology that preferred silent and invisible women, as well as analyzing the practical realities of women's wearing the garment, the author reveals key aspects of Greek gender relations. Women's veiling was so commonplace, in public and at home before unrelated men, that literary sources do not discuss it in detail. Through careful readings of texts and images, therefore, Llewellyn-Jones shows the extent of the custom and its social ramifications. He also uses comparative anthropological evidence from ancient and modern veiling societies effectively.

In Chapter One, the author suggests that scholars have not sufficiently acknowledged the extent of ancient Greek veiling because of modern Orientalist notions linking the act of veiling to the suppression of women in the Middle East. He argues that the Near Eastern origins of the Greek veil have led to its existence being overlooked or even consciously avoided, as shown by scholars' use of vocabulary such as "mantle," "cloak," or "hood" when referring to the garment (7).

Chapter Two focuses on Greek terms used for different types of veils, and the difficulties of matching the often vague terminology with painted or sculpted images. Llewellyn-Jones proposes to use more specific Arabic vocabulary for the varying veil types throughout the book, which he does successfully. He includes a table of the Greek words and definitions

from lexicons (36). Although the table does not solve the problem of the meaning of the terms, it does show the variety of language used and therefore the prevalence of veiling.

Chapter Three presents the different veil styles used by Greeks from the eighth century B.C.E. to the first century C.E. with art as evidence. Llewellyn-Jones acknowledges that different geographic regions likely had variations in costume, as is the case today, and some fashions may have come and gone quickly. His compelling conclusion is that the face and body became more hidden over time, culminating in the Hellenistic *tegidion*, a face-covering veil with eye-holes (62-64). The organization of this chapter is somewhat confusing and a chart or table of trends in art such as the lexicographical one that ends Chapter One would be helpful.

In Chapter Four, Llewellyn-Jones again examines visual sources, this time looking for an absence of veils in contradiction of literary sources. For example, vases depict unveiled women in public spaces such as fountain houses, where they would have been covered (88). In other cases women are unveiled in the presence of men, which would not have been the case in reality. The author suggests that in artistic contexts the veil was removed in order to reveal to the (presumed male) patron what was normally hidden from his gaze. Such a depiction would be valuable, desired, and erotically charged, as it gave the patron a window onto a feminine world he normally would not have seen. The argument is compelling, especially when the author points out scenes where veils are present, but the women are depicted as having pushed them down onto their necks (91-98). Llewellyn-Jones, however, does not acknowledge that many of these scenes appear on vases that were used exclusively by women, and therefore an in-

Book reviews, continued

tended female audience must be considered as well.

When veiled women do appear in sculpture and painting, they are often depicted as holding the veils away from their faces. One of the most significant contributions of the book is the rethinking of the so-called *anakalypsis* gesture. The gesture is identified by most scholars as symbolizing the bride's unveiling during the wedding ceremony. Llewellyn-Jones argues that this identification is not supported by literary evidence, and the gesture can also be seen as moving the veil over the face (104-07). Chapter Five examines the veil as a symbol of social status. Although in Homer veiling signifies a noblewoman (122-140), from the classical period on, veils were worn by all classes except (probably) slaves. Chapter Six links veiling to *aidos*, with that term's implications of modesty, respect, and even shame. The author makes the point that although the veil was used by men to depersonalize women, women were able to turn it into a means of expression. As in contemporary veiling societies, the flexible nature of the veil-- its ability to be manipulated-- was its own form of communication in response to different situations and people (177).

The book's title comes from Chapter Seven's discussion. Llewellyn-Jones uses the tortoise, once depicted with Aphrodite in a sculpture by Phidias, as a metaphor for ancient Greek women: silent, private, enclosed (190). Significantly, like a tortoise, a veiled Greek woman carried her enclosure with her. Although a means of subjugation, the veil did allow Greek women to leave the confines of their homes and be in public among strangers. Llewellyn-Jones effectively offers the analogy of veil and house through iconographic, literary, and anthropological evidence (192-199).

In Chapter Eight, the author examines the wedding veil and revisits the *anakalyp-teria* discussion. He explains that weddings involved not one but a series of unveilings, culminating in the groom's final uncovering of the bride in the bridal chamber. Llewellyn-Jones approaches this practice as a manifestation of the bride's being an object of male gaze and control. In Chapter Nine, the author links the veiling of the woman's head with the prevention of sexual pollution escaping through the orifices of her face. Chapter Ten discusses women's use of the veil in displays of both eroticism and grief. Both displays invite the viewer to gaze upon the woman, as opposed to the normal function of the veil to make the woman invisible.

This book is a major contribution that will become a standard in the field; one looks forward to the further discussion it will promote.

Marice E. Rose, Fairfield University

